

~~SECRET~~
SECURITY INFORMATION

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

24 May 1953

SUBJECT: NIE-96: THAILAND'S ABILITY TO WITHSTAND COMMUNIST
PRESSURES OR ATTACKS

THE PROBLEM

To estimate the political, economic, and armed strength of Thailand, with particular reference to Thailand's ability to withstand external or internal Communist pressures or attacks, through mid-1954.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Thailand's relative freedom from Communist pressure has probably been ended as a consequence of the recent Viet Minh incursion into Laos.
2. The regime in Thailand is not on the whole vulnerable to Communist subversion in the absence of strong external Communist

~~SECRET~~

pressures. However, there are weaknesses in Thailand's internal political situation which might become aggravated under increased external Communist pressures.

3. We believe that the Thai Government will be able to cope with Communist pressures on the scale which can be expected to develop in the immediate future.

4. However, within the period of this estimate, the presence of Communist guerrilla forces along Thailand's northeastern border will considerably increase Communist capabilities for subversion and for the development of a dissident movement among the Vietnamese in northeastern Thailand. As Communist strength increases on the border, Communist pressure on Thailand will grow. The anxiety of Thai leaders will increase proportionately, and they will almost certainly request assurances of increased support from the US.

5. While we believe that invasion of Thailand by regular Viet Minh forces is not likely during the period of this estimate, the situation would be drastically altered if the Communists should consolidate a position on Thailand's borders and threaten to invade Thailand in force. In that event, the resistance Thailand would make to the

~~SECRET~~

Communists would depend on whether Thailand's leaders believed sufficient external assistance could be counted on. Specifically, they would demand a US commitment to support and defend Thailand. If they were given such a commitment and were convinced that US help would be immediate and effective, we believe that the Thai leaders would stand firm against Communist pressures. If, on the other hand, it did not appear that the necessary amount of US aid would be forthcoming, Thailand's leaders would probably yield to Communist demands.

DISCUSSION

I. THE CURRENT SITUATION IN THAILAND

6. The effects of recent events in Indochina. Thailand's relative freedom from Communist pressure has probably been ended as a consequence of the recent Viet Minh incursion into Laos, which has a common border with Thailand of about 900 miles in length. Although most of the Viet Minh regular troops that invaded Laos in April 1953 have apparently withdrawn northward for the present and Communist strength in Laos has not as yet been greatly increased, the prestige accruing from the Communist success enhances

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

Communist potential in the area. In coming months, some Communist consolidation will undoubtedly take place in Laos, thus creating expanded opportunities for intensified political warfare directed against Thailand and for guerrilla operations in the Thai border regions.

7. Political strength. The regime in Thailand is not on the whole vulnerable to Communist subversion in the absence of strong external Communist pressures. Government is conducted by a small military clique, and maintains effective control over a populace which is inclined to be apathetic but which in general supports the regime. Thailand has a long history of independence, a well-developed sense of national unity, and is free from strong anti-colonial feelings like those in other Southeast Asian countries. Although Thai nationalism occasionally takes anti-Western forms, a generally pro-Western sentiment exists throughout the government and the public at large. Thailand has sent troops and naval units to Korea.

8. Maintenance of Thai national integrity has in the past required Thai leaders to play off powerful foreign interests against each other. However, Thai governments have not generally

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

offered strong resistance to powerful external pressures, but have accommodated themselves to the dominant external power of the moment. A characteristic feature of Thai policy has been the tendency of Thai leaders to make a decision based on an assessment of the external pressures that could be brought to bear on them, and the weight of opposing forces that could be mustered to resist such pressures.

9. There are certain weaknesses in Thailand's internal political situation which might become aggravated under increased external Communist pressures. Intrigues in government circles have in the past led to swift transfers of power. At present, rivalry for political supremacy continues within Thailand's ruling military clique, chiefly involving Premier Phibun Songgram, Police General Phao Sriyanon, and Army General Sarit Thanarat. However, there is no evidence that this rivalry has been accentuated by pressures arising from the Viet Minh invasion of Laos and the creation of a "Thai Autonomous Area" in southern Yunnan by the Chinese Communists.

10. Another potential weakness in the event of increased external pressure lies in the existence of several dissident or pro-Communist groups within Thailand. The most important of these

~~SECRET~~

groups, in the light of recent events in Indochina, is a Vietnamese (largely Annamite) community of from 75,000 to 100,000, concentrated for the most part in five provinces of northeast Thailand bordering Laos and Cambodia. This group is in general sympathetic to the Viet Minh, and supplies some food, money, medicines, arms, and ammunition to the Communists in Indochina. There is indication that this group also provides the Viet Minh guerrillas with a safe haven and a recruiting base in Thailand.

11. Among the approximately 3 million Chinese in Thailand, many of whom sympathize with Communist China, is a small but vigorous Chinese Communist Party of Thailand with hard-core membership of about 2,000 and a far larger group of supporters. The party exerts a strong influence in the Chinese-dominated labor movement and is capable of inciting strikes and sabotage. The Party also possesses moderate influence over the Chinese-language press and Chinese educational and business circles in Thailand. The Communist appeal to the Chinese population rests in part on Chinese dislike of the Thai and resentment of Thai restrictive policies toward the Chinese community. Both the Chinese Communist Party and the small and ineffectual Thai Communist Party are illegal in Thailand.

12. Under conditions of increased external Communist pressure, former Premier Pridi Phanomyong might become a rallying point for disaffected groups in Thailand. Although Pridi has been in exile from Thailand for more than five years, he appears still to have a considerable number of supporters in the northeast and among politically-conscious Thai in government, military, business, and professional circles. Pridi's exact whereabouts is unknown, but there are frequent reports that he may be in Communist China. There have been reports that the Communist leadership has plans, which may include Pridi, for a future "Thai People's Government."

13. Economic Strength. Economic conditions in Thailand offer the Communists little to exploit. Thailand enjoys a high standard of living for the Far East. Taxes are low. The national debt is small. The fiscal position is sound. Thailand is free from population pressure (approximately 19,000,000 people and an area slightly larger than Spain). There is relatively little unemployment, and extreme poverty is absent. The country is relatively free from the agrarian unrest associated with oppressive forms of land tenure. Thailand has a favorable balance of trade, and sells practically all its exports to non-Communist countries. The market for rice, which is Thailand's principal export, is good and will

~~SECRET~~

probably remain so. A point of vulnerability to Communist pressure lies in the uncertainty of continued markets in the West for Thai secondary exports, especially rubber, tin, and wolfram.

14. Military and Police Strength. Thailand's military and police forces have an estimated total strength of about 112,000. The Royal Thai Army, which shares the responsibility for defending Thailand with the National Police, numbers slightly under 50,000. The combat effectiveness of Thai army units varies greatly, and though it remains generally low by US standards, a good deal of progress has been made under US programs of reorganization and re-equipping. No serious problem of political unreliability is believed to exist among the rank-and-file of the Thai army. The officer corps, however, is divided into several major factions, each with its paramount loyalty to one or another of the principals of the military clique. At the present time, the army's strength is concentrated in the Bangkok and Central Thailand area. About 10,000 troops are presently stationed in the eastern provinces of Thailand.

15. The Royal Thai Air Force has a personnel complement of about 10,000. It presently has about 40 piston fighters and 20 transports which are combat-ready; in addition, approximately 15 Thai

~~SECRET~~

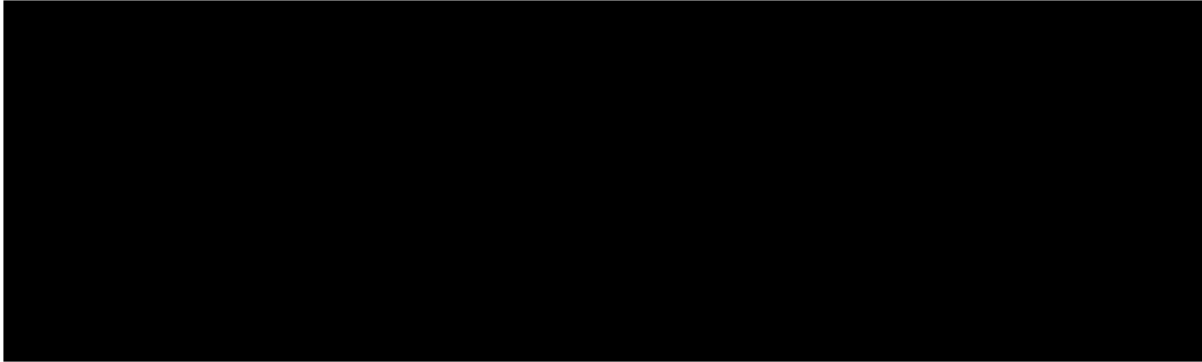
civil air transports provide an emergency reserve. The combat effectiveness of the RTAF is low, its chief deficiencies being: equipment shortages, low serviceability rates, a very weak communications system, and small and poorly equipped airfields.

16. The Royal Thai Navy, with approximately 13,000 personnel, would be largely ineffective against any enemy naval attack in strength. However, it could assist army and police forces in combatting internal uprisings.

17. The Thai police force of approximately 40,000 is a national force which, in addition to normal police duties, has primary responsibility for internal security, domestic intelligence, and border patrol. In time of emergency or even of invasion, the police force would bear the first brunt of the attack. However, the police establishment cannot properly be regarded as a fourth branch of the armed services because it has no heavy equipment, no unit-training larger than company size, and poor mobility of units larger than patrol size. Other weaknesses of the police include: inadequate coordination with military and civilian authorities; a weak intelligence system, especially with respect to Chinese activities in Thailand; [REDACTED]

25X6A

25X6A



II. THAILAND'S ABILITY TO WITHSTAND COMMUNIST PRESSURES OR ATTACKS

19. The Thai Government has reacted to the Viet Minh invasion of Laos by preparing an appeal to the UN; this claim for external assistance asks the Security Council to investigate the current situation in Laos and determine whether Communist activities there constitute a threat to the peace. The Thai have also reinforced the 5,000-6,000 police regularly assigned to the northeast with several hundred specially trained and equipped police, and have established patrols along the entire eastern border, especially concentrated at the more vulnerable points opposite central and southern Laos. In addition, the government is considering the evacuation of some 400-500 pro-Viet Minh leaders from among the Vietnamese population in the border area. Because of the length of the Indochina border, the size of the Vietnamese minority, and the limited strength and effectiveness of available Thai military

and police forces, it will be manifestly impossible for the Thai effectively to control this border area.

20. We believe that the Thai Government will be able to cope with Communist pressures on the scale which can be expected to develop in the immediate future. However, within the period of this estimate, the presence of Communist guerrilla forces along Thailand's northeastern border will considerably increase Communist capabilities for subversion and for the development of a dissident movement among the Vietnamese in northeastern Thailand, an area which has long been economically depressed relative to the rest of Thailand and a center of domestic opposition to the present regime. As Communist strength increases on the border, Communist pressure on Thailand will grow. The anxiety of Thai leaders will increase proportionately, and they will almost certainly request assurances of increased support from the US.

21. While we believe that invasion of Thailand by regular Viet Minh forces is not likely during the period of this estimate, the situation would be drastically altered if the Communists should consolidate a position on Thailand's borders and threaten to invade Thailand in force. In that event, the resistance Thailand would make to the Communists would depend on whether Thailand's leaders believed

[REDACTED]

sufficient external assistance could be counted on. Specifically, they would demand a US commitment to support and defend Thailand. If they were given such a commitment and were convinced that US help would be immediate and effective, we believe that the Thai leaders would stand firm against Communist pressures. If, on the other hand, it did not appear that the necessary amount of US aid would be forthcoming, Thailand's leaders would probably yield to Communist demands.